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SUBJECT: SERBIA: UNHCR REFINES CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR POPULATION
MOVEMENTS

REF: 08 BELGRADE 0061

08 BELGRADE 0021

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Belgrade continues contingency planning and preparations for possible population displacements from Kosovo into Serbia, in consultation with Serbian Government, NGOs, and donors. UNHCR officials told emboff that, while the government has not openly shared its action or contingency planning, it has assured UNHCR that preparations are underway. The government did, however, assure UNHCR that it would not restrict the movement of displaced persons to or through Southern Serbia. End Summary.

UNHCR: Hands-on and On-Hand Experience

2. (SBU) On January 11, refcoord met with John Young, UNHCR Senior Protection Officer to discuss continuing contingency preparation for population movements out of Kosovo that might result from status decisions -- in particular, a declaration of Kosovo independence. Young said that, in line with planned reinforcement of field operations, UNHCR headquarters would send Senior Emergency Officer Andrej Kazakov to Belgrade January 20 for an initial three-week period and an option of remaining on the ground as long as the situation merited. Kazakov will assist in all aspects of emergency preparations, including leading a UNHCR-led full-day refresher training course for UNHCR's contingency-planning implementing partners, later this month. Kazakov's substantial humanitarian emergency experience derives from his UNHCR service in Sarajevo and Belgrade, throughout most of the 90's. According to Young, he is well respected by the Government of Serbia (GOS) for his work during the 1999 conflict.

NO SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURES FROM KOSOVO

3. (SBU) Young also told refcoord that UNHCR had increased its field monitoring across Serbia and was encouraged there had been no significant departures from Kosovo in recent weeks. To date, there have been only 28 arrivals since mid November, mostly resulting from health, or extraordinary family circumstances. All have requested IDP status. UNHCR will continue to keep a close watch on movements in the coming weeks.

KOSOVO MINISTRY WILL NOT RESTRICT POPULATION MOVEMENT

4. (SBU) Young told refcoord that the Ministry for Kosovo had no plans to restrict movement to the areas near the Kosovo administrative boundary. According to Young, Assistant Minister for Kosovo Vuko Anjonić (DSS) told UNHCR Belgrade Representative

Lennart Kotsalainen and Young in a January 11 meeting that Serbia's primary goal was to discourage movements out of Kosovo, but, contrary to what State Secretary for the Ministry of Kosovo Dusan Prorokovic had suggested to UNHCR in earlier meetings, the Ministry had no plans to restrict movement to Southern Serbia. On the contrary, Anjonićević told UNHCR officials that they would not repeat the mistakes of 1999, in which they had severely restricted and directed the movement of Kosovars crossing the border into Serbia. Anjonićević added, however, that Serbia expected international forces to protect ethnic minorities and prevent violence in Kosovo. If all else fails however, he told UNHCR reps that Serbia would be obliged to protect its population.

15. (SBU) Young said that Antonijević anticipated only up to 10% of the minority population in Kosovo would move in case of UDI by Kosovo authorities. Antonijević told UNHCR, the Ministry for Kosovo would continue to pay salaries to Kosovo Serbs and, in general, would strengthen the footprint of the Serbian state in Kosovo, as it had done in Gracanica and North Mitrovica.

16. (SBU) Antonijević reiterated to UNHCR reps that the Ministry for Kosovo would coordinate all inter-ministerial action plans in case of population displacements into Serbia.

WHICH MINISTRY WILL LEAD?

17. (SBU) Bojan Adželković (DS), Assistant Minister for Labor and Social Policy told refcoord on January 15 the ministerial action plans in case of Kosovo declaration of independence are confidential documents. He said only Minister for Labor and Social Policy Rasim Ljajić (SDS) had access to his ministry's plan.

18. (SBU) Though Andželković told refcoord he believed there would be no major population displacements from Kosovo he emphasized that the Ministry, with its network of municipal level social welfare

BELGRADE 00000070 002 OF 002

offices, would have timely information on any movements and would be in the ideal position to provide assistance in case of mass displacements. He added that Minister Ljajić, as President of the Coordinating Body for Southern Serbia (which includes Presevo, Bujanovac, and Medvedja municipalities), would have a lead coordinating role in an emergency, as he felt the majority of individuals who would leave would cross into Southern Serbia, particularly Bujanovac. (This matches UNHCR projections of potential population flows.)

19. (SBU) Andželković did not comment on the role that the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees might have. He told refcoord that the Ministry for Kosovo would limit its focus to Kosovo proper, in case of an emergency, and that the Ministry of Labor would manage all else. He reminded refcoord the most important goal of the GOS was to encourage people in Kosovo to remain where they are. "They know there will be limited resources for them in Serbia if they leave their property in Kosovo," Andželković said.

110. (SBU) In a January 11 email to the refcoord regarding ministerial roles and responsibilities in case of population movements, Kotsalainen wrote: "While Proroković clearly said that CCK [sic] is in-charge in terms of planning and coordination which also was confirmed by Antonijević, Dabetić said that IDPs was his 'mandate' although he has not been proactive in terms of contingency planning. There seems to be some internal confusion here. The less than clear role of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in terms of IDPs adds to the confusion."

COMMENT

111. (SBU) While the lack of coordination and inter-agency planning is a cause for some concern, the fact that government entities are planning for and talking with humanitarian assistance agencies about possible population flows is encouraging. We emphasize that government, international agencies, and observers (including within the embassy and diplomatic communities) remain optimistic that,

barring violence, movements of people from Kosovo in the coming months will be minor. We will remain in close contact with UNHCR and continue engage our contacts in key ministries in a constructive dialogue about their responsibilities to any new displacements. End Comment.

MUNTER